

Re-examining airport land use from a wildlife and economic perspective: What are the options?

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The choice of land cover at airports depends on air-operations safety regulations, economic considerations, location, and wildlife-hazard management. To reduce costs associated with turf-grass maintenance, many airports in the USA (especially general aviation airports) lease substantial portions of airport properties for production of row crops and small grains, despite wildlife-associated hazards ostensibly inherent to these land-cover types. Our objectives were to 1) to review legislation that affects land use at airports and surrounding communities relative to managing and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation; and 2) identify information gaps and future research needs relative to regulated land uses on and near airports, and the effects on wildlife populations. We show that international guidelines for land-use practices on and near airports with regard to wildlife hazards to aviation are often vague, conflicting, and ill-supported scientifically. However, we suggest that revenue-producing options for airports are available in some traditional agricultural crops and biofuel plantings. Also, biofuel options might allow airports to selectively manage for nonhazardous wildlife species and maintain esthetics. Land uses at airports influence wildlife populations, therefore by understanding and incorporating these effects into planning airport managers can prioritize safety, revenue, and conservation goals.